



## **Workplace Wellness: Getting Your Program Started**

Wellness issues important to you – brought to you by the insurance specialists at Brown & Brown Benefit Advisors.

Once an organization decides they want a workplace wellness program, the first question is often “What kinds of things should we do?” Before you have that discussion, you should lay the groundwork and get more information. The following is a summary of items you can do to get started.

### **Gain Support from Management**

Support from all levels of management is a key to the success of your wellness program. To ensure the support of management, inform managers about the program early on and encourage them to participate. Communicate clearly and often the goals and benefits to the company and participants. Allocate sufficient resources and staff time to developing and implementing your wellness program.

### **Assemble a Workgroup**

Your wellness workgroup is responsible for promoting the worksite wellness program, planning activities, recruiting team leaders and conducting the evaluation. The size of the committee will depend on the size of your company and the scope of the program or activities. The committee should include staff that represents various employee shifts and departments such as management, union representatives, human resources or administrative assistants. There is no minimum or maximum size, but the workgroup should be large enough to represent your workforce. If you already have a wellness or health promotion committee or other groups interested in taking on this role, involve them on the workgroup. Workgroup members can focus on recruitment, activities, events, rewards/incentives, and evaluation.

### **Designate a Coordinator**

Management or the wellness team should identify a Wellness Coordinator to manage the program. Although the wellness team and others can share some of the responsibilities, having the right person coordinating efforts increases the likelihood that the program will be well-managed and well-delivered. The level of success for the wellness program is often linked to the coordinator’s time and ability. It is essential that some or all of the coordinator’s time be dedicated to the wellness program. If this isn’t possible, then the company should consider contracting with an outside party to provide programming. Local health care organizations and YMCAs often provide this service. Check with your local contacts to see if this is an option.

## **Schedule Workgroup Meetings**

The wellness team should meet regularly, at least on a quarterly basis. The workgroup may meet more often during peak times when planning or implementing activities or programs. The frequency of meetings will depend on what the workgroup plans to accomplish.

## **Analyze Your Needs**

Complete a worksite environmental assessment and conduct an employee interest survey to collect information on the topics that would be of most interest to the staff. This type of prior planning and analyzing can help you get the most for your investment. Plan activities and initiatives, and set program priorities based on the results of these assessments.

## **Develop an Action Plan**

This should include specific goals and objectives, strategies to meet these goals, a timeline, a budget and an evaluation plan. If your goals are clearly identified, it will be easier to evaluate the effectiveness of your wellness program.

## **Invest Accordingly**

Building a successful worksite wellness program requires staff time as well as money. Some larger organizations may spend 20 hours per week for three to six months preparing all the steps prior to launching a worksite wellness program.

Monetary costs can fluctuate widely, depending on whether the employer pays all costs, the employees pay all costs or the costs are shared. The Wellness Council of America estimates the cost per employee to be between \$100 and \$150 per year for an effective wellness program that produces a return on investment of \$300 to \$450. Keep in mind that the return on investment will likely be greater with more comprehensive programs, so the higher cost will also generate a greater return on investment due to lower health care costs and less absenteeism.

## **Implement and Communicate the Plan**

You need an effective communication strategy to help put your plan into motion, to get employees to buy in and encourage participation. Be sure to include plenty of education so employees understand why you're implementing a wellness program, and the benefits they can gain as a result of participating.

## **Evaluate Outcomes**

Periodically review your program goals and compare with measurable outcomes or results. Keep employees involved in the evaluation process, to make sure that they feel the program is benefiting them. Adjust programs and initiatives accordingly, based on employee feedback and evaluation results.

After you've laid the groundwork to develop a wellness program, take the time to plan the components that will result in a quality program. Following these steps and not rushing the planning process will ultimately make your program more successful.

*This article is not intended to be exhaustive nor should any discussion or opinions be construed as legal advice. Readers should contact legal counsel for legal advice.*